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Sony BMG Ramps Up CD Copy-Protection Plan

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By Ed Christman

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NEW YORK (Billboard) - It looks like music retailers will soon be getting their wish: At least one major is getting aggressive with copy-protected CDs.

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Sony BMG Music Entertainment is stepping up the rollout of what it calls content-enhanced and copy-protected CDs, according to company executives. It began with the Chieftains' "Live From Dublin" album, released Feb. 22. Upcoming albums that will receive the treatment are from Kasabian (March 8) and Susie Suh (March 29).

Sony BMG expects that by year's end a substantial number of its U.S. releases will employ either Sunncomm's newly enhanced MediaMax or First4Internet's XCP to address piracy concerns. No matter which technology a CD uses, it will include such extras as photo galleries, enhanced liner notes and links to other features.

"What matters the most to us is the consumer experience," Sony BMG Sales Enterprise co-president Jordan Katz says. "Both technologies offer playability across all standard players, including CD players, boomboxes, DVD players, PCs, Macs, car stereos, video games and clock radios."

Katz says the company wants to alert the industry that it is implementing the content-protection technology, because extensive consumer research indicates widespread customer acceptance of it.

BMG has used MediaMax on a number of titles, including Velvet Revolver's "Contraband" and Anthony Hamilton's solo album. In all, it has shipped more than 5.5 million content-enhanced and protected discs, which have been met with positive consumer reactions, according to Katz.

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After testing XCP on promos, Sony BMG is using it for commercial releases. Katz notes that XCP and MediaMax are constantly being improved, and that Sony BMG will test each upgrade on promos before employing it commercially.

The albums coming out now and in the immediate future will allow for three copies to be made. "We haven't set on what the number of copies should be, other than there should be a limited number; it shouldn't be infinite," Katz says. "Our research shows that the consumer thinks that's fair. So you are seeing Sony BMG taking a leadership role in this area, with increasing traction throughout the year in terms of a number of (our) releases."

Reuters/Billboard



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